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ABSTRACT

Traditional theories of career development and career choice have been useful for the typical middle class male. Career counselors must improvise, however, when serving clients who are less advantaged, minorities, handicapped, unemployed adults, or women. A model of career choice for women and men developed by Helen Astin focuses on the need to look beyond the status quo and to explore not only training and employment issues, but also issues in various support systems: financial aid, employment policies relevant to women and minorities, childcare options, and changing social norms with respect to family and work roles. Astin's model calls attention to a wide range of opportunities relevant to career choice. Different components in career development theory are relevant for different age groups and different individuals. These components need to be identified, empirically verified, and routinely addressed in career counseling. Researchers must begin to identify key constructs within the structure of opportunity for different age groups and individuals and to provide evidence of the relative strength of the influence of these constructs on socialization, work expectations, and work behavior. This will require longitudinal studies with subjects of various ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Counselors must begin to incorporate some of these considerations into their career counseling practices. (NRB)

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Symposium, APA, Los Angeles, 1985
Helen Astin's Model of Career Choice for Women and Men
Helen Farmer (Some Missing Pieces)

By the time this symposium is presented many persons present in the audience will have read The Counseling Psychologist, Vol. 12 (4), 1984 devoted to the Career Development of Women. In addition to Helen Astin's major treatise in that volume, eight women scholars wrote responses. I wrote one of these responses and it is not my intention to repeat what I said there. Originally I entitled my presentation for today's symposium, "Some Missing Pieces." This title focussed on ways to enhance Astin's model and would have repeated much of my TCP response. Therefore, I beg the audience's indulgence in order to shift my remarks to somewhat different turf.

What I want to do today is to focus, not on the details of the model, but on the broad brush strokes of the model and its potential impact on research and practice. I entitled my TCP response, "A shiny fresh minted penny" because, for me, Astin has highlighted and focussed attention on the importance of the "Structure of Opportunity" in the career development process for both men and women. This focus is new, and I believe, constitutes a major contribution to vocational psychology.

Traditional theories of career development and choice have served us well for the typical middle class male student or adult. However, when counseling those who are less advantaged, minorities, persons from lower socioeconomic classes, women, unemployed adults, and the handicapped, career counselors have had to improvise. The existing theories account well for the psychological variables relevant to career choice, but less well for the environmental variables that have influenced a person's socialization in the past and that continue to influence their behavior and attitudes in the present. To be fair to the traditional vocational development theories, I must say that these theories do recognize the influence of the environment on career development and choice. However, the operationalization of this impact in ways useful to career counselors is largely absent. Let me illustrate. Traditional theories highlight developmental stages and related experiences and tasks. The implications of these theories are thus different for different age groups and for persons who have not successfully mastered tasks at earlier stages. Certain experiences are considered important for optimal vocational development. These experiences provide for learning an appreciation of the range of work opportunities available in our society, for learning work related skills including decision-making, and for learning what one likes and doesn't like, and what one does well or poorly. All of this, and it is a lot, is either implicit or explicit in career development theory as presented by Donald Super, and related work by Jack Crites. The most recent work by Super has focussed attention on the influence of social roles, the interplay between roles such as those of worker, homemaker, community person, student, etc., and changing role priorities over the life span. We don't need a new theory to focus

attention on this aspect of career development and choice. An important outgrowth of career development theory is career education in elementary as well as high school. These programs apply the principles of career development in their design in order to provide more optimal socialization experiences to students.

John Krumboltz, who is a speaker on this symposium today, made a major contribution to operationalizing the socialization process in career development through the application of social learning theory. Krumboltz's contribution has provided career educators in the schools with guidelines for optimizing the career development experiences of young persons.

If we have all of this implied in present theories what has Astin added? What is different about her model is its focus on the need to look beyond the status quo to emerging, nascent opportunities not only in training and employment, but in support systems such as financial aid available, employment policies relevant to women and minorities, childcare availability, and changing social norms with respect to family and work roles. Although many counselors have counseled clients in ways that take the structure of opportunity into account, their efforts are largely serendipitous and not easily replicable. Nancy Cole and Gary Hansen at the American College Testing Program, proposed an opportunity approach to the use of career interest inventories early in the 1970's. Their approach is an exception to what I just said, because it is replicable and widely applied by interested counselors. Astin has called attention to a fuller range of opportunities, however, relevant to career choice. I believe that what Astin has done for career development theory is to place squarely on the agenda the need to identify the relevant components of this structure for different age groups and individuals and to ensure that these components, once identified and empirically verified, are routinely addressed in career counseling, as routinely as interests and aptitudes are addressed today.

At the risk of repeating myself, I would like to make this point one more time (i.e., the point about Astin's major contribution). Sharon Kahn in her response to Astin's model (TCP, 12 (4)) points to the consistency of her model with feminist counseling theory. Feminist theory emphasizes the important role the socialization process plays in a woman's present predicament, but goes beyond this emphasis to help a woman take an active role in not only changing her own behavior but also in changing her environment (i.e., to transcend her past socialization). Feminist scholarship has over the past 15 or 20 years provided

a strong case for the role of socialization in gender discrimination. What Astin does is to build on this evidence and go one step further, focussing our attention,now,on the possibilities, often untapped, for greater equity and satisfaction in work for both men and women.

Thus, I see, as the agenda for researchers to begin to identify key constructs within the structure of opportunity for different age groups and individuals and to provide evidence of the relative strength of the influence of these on both the socialization process and on work expectations and behavior. This research agenda could take us into the next century. Longitudinal studies are needed with a range of subjects including representative ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Statistical innovations are required to adequately assess interactive influences. All of this should take place before counseling applications. But, somehow that seems unethical. There are untapped opportunities that clients can be appraised of without waiting for all the evidence to come in. I would challenge practitioners to begin incorporating some of these opportunities into their career counseling in the present.

My closing thoughts relate to some of the components of the structure of opportunity for different age groups. Helen Astin in her response to the eight reaction papers in TCP described a current study she is conducting with a colleague in which academic faculty are being assessed longitudinally on variables such as financial aid available for research, proportion of women on the faculty, institutional support for women's studies programs, scholarly productivity requirements, career advancement (i.e., time required to obtain tenure), and quality and structure of family relations. I might add childcare availability and homecare availability to this list, among others. For adolescents I would include educational opportunities, availability of career counseling, attitudes of counselors and teachers with respect to sex typing of social roles and behaviors, behavior of counselors and teachers on relevant dimensions, etc., etc. For children in grade school I would include the structure of the classroom in addition to attitudes and behavior of teachers and counselors (if these exist). I think it would be very productive, along this line, to have some work sessions at APA next year to focus on practical and research implications of Astin's"Structure of Opportunity." And on that note I will close these remarks.

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